FIRST PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF ATLANTA

JANUARY 16, 1993

10:00 A.M.

THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH IS AN URBAN SETTING

A SENSE OF VOCATION

JOHN M. BUCHANAN

FOURTH PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, CHICAGO,

GOOD TO BE IN ATLANTA, ALTHOUGH I NEED TO BE CANDID ABOUT THE FACT THAT IN THE AREA OF MY LIFE-LONG LOVE AFFAIR WITH BASEBALL, ATLANTA HAS RECENTLY BECOME ENEMY TERRITORY.

LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT MY LAST VISIT HERE. IT WAS OCTOBER 14. I WAS HERE TO DELIVER A STEWARDSHIP SPEECH AT Trinity-----CHURCH. OCTOBER 14, IN CASE YOU HAVE FORGOTTEN, IS THE NIGHT THE BRAVES WON THE NATIONAL LEAGUE PENNANT. NOW, I AM A CHICAGO CUBS FAN BECAUSE

THEY ARE OUR TEAM AND WRIGLEY FIELD IS ONLY TEN MINUTES AWAY BY SUBWAY AND THERE IS NO BETTER PLACE TO BE ON A WARM JUNE SATURDAY. BUT BEFORE I WAS A CUBS FAN, I WAS A PITTSBURGH PIRATES FAN - FROM WAY BACK. I CAN TAKE YOU AROUND THE 1948 INFIELD, WHICH LED THE NATIONAL LEAGUE IN DOUBLE PLAYS - HOPP MURTAUGH, ROJEK, GUSTINE. THAT'S THE YEAR THE BRAVES WERE IN BOSTON AND THE YEAR THEY LOST THE WORLD SERIES TO THE CLEVELAND INDIANS - "SPAHN AND SAIN AND PRAY FOR RAIN." I DIGRESS - BUT IT IS SOMETHING OF A HABIT WITH THE FRANCHISE. I AM — DOWN DEEP - WHERE I LOVE GOD AND MY WIFE - A PIRATES FAN. SO ON OCTOBER 14, I WAS A GUEST IN THE HOME OF A VERY ENTHUSIASTIC BRAVES FAN AND AS YOU MAY RECALL - THE PIRATES WERE COMFORTABLY AHEAD GOING INTO THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH. AND I WAS SITTING IN MY HOST'S

the Pirates were the team the Braves — play — + you may also recall that

EASY CHAIR RATHER ENJOYING MYSELF, TRYING NOT TO GLOAT, AND HE WAS SUFFERING, SILENTLY AND GRACIOUSLY. AND THEN SUDDENLY, IN THE BOTTOM OF THE NINTH IT CAME UNRAVELED AND WITH TWO OUT AND AN UNLIKELY, UNKNOWN PINCH HITTER AT BAT, THE BRAVES SUDDENLY, DRAMATICALLY, WON THE GAME AND THE PENNANT AND IT WAS, I CAN SAY, ONE OF THE MOST TERRIBLE MOMENTS IN MY LIFE. WORSE, YET, BEING A GUEST IN A BRAVES FAN'S HOME AND A CLERGYPERSON AT THAT, I COULD NOT BEGIN TO SAY THE WORDS THAT WERE SUGGESTING THEMSELVES AS THE ONLY APPROPRIATE ~~WORDS~~ expressions AT THE MOMENT.

AND NOW, YOU HAVE OUR BEST CATCHER - Damon Berryhill - AND OUR BEST PITCHER Gregg Maddux WHO IS ALSO THE BEST PITCHER CURRENTLY PLAYING THE GAME AND ONE OF THE VERY FEW AND INCREASINGLY SPARSE BONAFIDE MAJOR LEAGUE PLAYERS

WORKING FOR THE CUBS. | SO, PLEASE DO WIN IT ALL THIS YEAR.

I'M PLEASED TO BE HERE ON GEORGE WIRTH'S HOME TURF. | HE IS, AS YOU KNOW, A GOOD ONE. | HE IS ARTICULATE, ENERGETIC, ONE OF THE COLLEAGUES WHO MAKES ME PROUD TO BE A PRESBYTERIAN. AND I'M PLEASED TO BE HERE IN DOWNTOWN ATLANTA, ~~IN~~ ~~ON~~ WHAT I REGARD AS A CRITICAL OUTPOST OF CHRISTIAN MISSION, EVERY BIT AS VITAL AS WERE THOSE LONELY MISSIONARY HOSPITALS, SCHOOLS, CHURCHES ON THE FRONTIER - OR OVERSEAS A CENTURY AGO, THE MODERN AMERICAN CITY.

I THINK A LOT OF THE FUTURE OF THE CHURCH ~~CHRISTIANITY~~ IN AMERICA WILL BE DETERMINED BY WHAT HAPPENS IN MISSIONARY OUTPOSTS LIKE THIS ONE. | AND I HAVE AN EVEN STRONGER SENSE THAT WHAT HAPPENS IN THE FUTURE OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH (U.S.A.) IS BEING DETERMINED BY THE

The least you could do

Geo. is so organized puts most of us to shame..

He's also a little obsessive. He told me about Fred Craddock at Pittsburg - w/ suitcase full of literature.. show him

Geo. is so organized.

Great church creative dinner program.. busy - lively - faithful place - I read it all (I'm Type A too) - openness - warmth - connection.. you are Presbyterian - Miss Stout .. attempts to portray God's mission -

let me tell you how organized. | Daughter Diane - Denton Texas about to give birth - not due till 4/30, but minor problem will induce. | Mr. told all this .. Denton friend in Atlanta. | walked in - inquired.. said he knew my daughter - "O yes she's fine.. will deliver on May 4th - successful contractions - Mrs B. will be called Dia - married. | Here's wait for you being in Atlanta

PREACHING, WORSHIP, EDUCATION AND MISSION OUTREACH OF URBAN CONGREGATIONS IN THE HEART OF AMERICA'S CITIES, AS THE 20TH CENTURY COMES TO AN END.

GEORGE TOLD ME THAT THE THEME FIRST CHURCH ATLANTA HAS ADOPTED FOR THE YEAR IS "THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH" AND ASKED ME TO BE MINDFUL OF THAT EMPHASIS AS I PREPARED MY REMARKS.

AND SO FOR THE NEXT TWO DAYS I WILL BE DISCUSSING "THE COMMUNITY OF FAITH IN AN URBAN SETTING;" THIS MORNING, "A SENSE OF VOCATION;" TONIGHT, "A SENSE OF THE CHURCH," AND TOMORROW MORNING, "A SENSE OF THE COMMUNITY."

BEING THE CHURCH IN THE CITY IS NO SIMPLE MATTER. IT NEVER HAS BEEN. THE EARLIEST CHURCHES IN PLACES WITH NAMES LIKE EPHESUS, PHILIPPI, ANTIOCH, ROME - TO WHOM AND ABOUT WHOM ST. PAUL WROTE

not parking - but they did have to deal w/ diversity - public morality - life style + rel. & faith to life.

LETTERS, WERE URBAN CHURCHES WITH URBAN CHURCH PROBLEMS AND CHALLENGES.

~~BUT~~ TODAY IT IS MORE COMPLICATED THAN EVER. YOU KNOW OUR LITANY OF LAMENTS.

PARKING - IT IS SIMPLY ASSUMED THAT YOU CAN'T HAVE CHURCH GROWTH WITHOUT PARKING. MANY URBAN CHURCHES HAVE NONE, MINE AMONG THEM. WE HAVE A 25 CAR LOT WHICH IS A CURSE - A SOURCE OF ENDLESS CONFLICT AND UNHAPPINESS. PEOPLE WHO COME TO FOURTH CHURCH HAVE TO FIGURE IT OUT WITHOUT A SPACIOUS LOT. THOSE HUGE, SUBURBAN MEGA CHURCHES BY WHICH WE LIKE TO MEASURE OURSELVES - HAVE MORE AND BETTER PARKING THAN O'HARE FIELD, COMPLETE WITH UNIFORMED GUARDS AND SHUTTLE BUSSES.

Ped. Surgeon Cook County - wonderful Doc - a surgeon - # park space - called parked in - 36 - he pushed - 2 cancer damaged both

Willow Creek Community -

Quigley Sem - 10,000 alumni + 10 spaces ?

AND SECURITY - OUR SECRET. | PURSES ARE TAKEN - SO ARE FUR COATS. | AT FOURTH CHURCH SOMETHING LIKE THAT HAPPENS ONCE A WEEK.

AND THE ~~NOW~~ HOMELESS AND ADDICTED WALKING THE STREETS OF OUR CITY: | PEOPLE WHO USED TO BE PATIENTS IN STATE HOSPITALS OR RESIDENTS OF LOCAL BUT NOW LARGELY NON-EXISTENT SINGLE ROOM OCCUPANCY ROOMING HOUSES - WHO TURN TO THE CHURCH AS A LAST AND ONLY REFUGE AND WHO SCARE OTHER PEOPLE TO DEATH. —

URBAN CHURCHES, IF THEY ASPIRE TO BE "COMMUNITIES OF FAITH," AS YOU HAVE DONE, HAVE ADDITIONAL PROBLEMS. | OFTEN THEY DON'T LIVE IN A PARISH, A NEIGHBORHOOD, BUT INSTEAD IN THE MIDST OF WAREHOUSES, | FAST FOOD RESTAURANTS, HOTELS AND DEPARTMENT STORES. | SOMETIMES NOBODY LIVES AROUND THE CHURCH. | (HAPPILY,

~~LY,~~ THE REVERSE IS THE CASE FOR FOURTH CHURCH. OUR IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS ARE THE FOUR SEASONS, RITZ CARLTON, THE WESTIN, BLOOMINGDALE'S, LORD & TAYLOR, MARSHALL FIELD— AND OVER AND JUST BEHIND THEM LIVE 70,000 PEOPLE AND SO IN A CURIOUS TWIST, WE ARE A NEW KIND OF NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCH.) TYPICALLY, HOWEVER, THE PEOPLE WHO USED TO LIVE THERE DON'T ANY LONGER. NO YOUNGSTERS RIDE A BIKE TO BELL CHOIR PRACTICE. THE CHURCH IS NOT THE CENTER OF AN IDENTIFIABLE, DEFINABLE SPACE CALLED PARISH.

AND FURTHERMORE, SOME, IF NOT MANY PEOPLE, CHOOSE ANONYMITY. SOME, I THINK, PREFER IT. SOME CHOOSE IT BY DEFAULT. BUT, IN FACT, YOU CAN SIT IN WORSHIP IN AN URBAN CHURCH FOR YEARS WITHOUT SPEAKING TO A SOUL, OR BEING NOTICED BY A SOUL, AND RATHER LIKE IT THAT WAY. I DO NOT HAVE THE ALTERNATIVE

OF DROPPING IN ON MY MEMBERS FOR A VISIT. YOU HAVE TO HAVE AN APPOINTMENT TO GET PAST THE DOORMAN. AND NOW - ANOTHER TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCE - ANSWERING MACHINES MEAN THAT I CAN'T EVEN TALK TO THEM ON THE TELEPHONE.

Ellen Goodman on Ans. Machines
don't even have to talk to human -- wait till 5:10 -

AND THE ABSENCE OF FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN. NOT TOTALLY OF COURSE, BUT CITY CHURCH PEOPLE KNOW THAT THE LARGER CHURCH DENOMINATIONS, RELIGIOUS PUBLISHING HOUSES, PROGRAM PLANNERS, MAKE AN ASSUMPTION ABOUT THE FOCUS OF A CONGREGATION'S LIFE. THE FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN WHICH IS SIMPLY NOT ACCURATE NOR HELPFUL IN YOUR SITUATION. THE MAJORITY OF MY MEMBERS ARE SINGLE. FAMILIES WITH CHILDREN ARE A MINORITY AND A SMALL ONE.

THERE'S MUCH MORE. JUST KEEPING AN URBAN CHURCH CLEAN IS A MAJOR PROJECT. I THINK OF IT EVERY TIME I VISIT ONE OF

THOSE SPLENDID NEW SUBURBAN CHURCHES WITH MANICURED LAWN, HIGHLY POLISHED FLOOR, SPARKING GLASS. WE, ON THE OTHER HAND, ARE THE LABORATORY FACILITY FOR THE HOMELESS MEN AND WOMEN ON THE STREET. IT IS NOT UNUSUAL TO ENCOUNTER A MAN BATHING IN THE SINK OF THE MEN'S ROOM, NOR TO FIND THE REMAINS OF AN ITALIAN BEEF SANDWICH AND COKE ON A PEW IN THE SANCTUARY.

WE COULD CONTINUE THIS RECITAL INDEFINITELY, OF COURSE.

MAY I PROPOSE, HOWEVER, THAT EVERY-ONE OF THOSE COMPLICATING FACTORS BE-COMES A POTENTIAL FOR FAITHFUL AND CREATIVE MINISTRY AND THEREFORE A POSSI-BLE STRENGTH.

A FEW FOR INSTANCES:

WITH NO DEFINED, IDENTIFIABLE PARISH, A CITY CHURCH IS OFTEN A CHURCH FOR THE WHOLE CITY, A PLACE WHERE, IN

JOHN WESLEY'S MEMORABLE IMAGE, THE WORLD IS THE PARISH." I THINK THAT'S A STRENGTH. IF WE MUST LEARN TO LIVE WITHOUT THE EASY INTIMACY AND COZINESS OF SUBURBAN OR NEIGHBORHOOD CHURCHES, WE CAN EXHIBIT A ~~EMBRACING~~ Bracing, EXHILARATING WORLDLINESS WHICH IS ALSO A FAITHFUL AND NECESSARY WITNESS. IN FACT, I WOULD FIND IT CONSTRAINING NOT TO BE IN A PLACE WHERE THE CHURCH AND WORLD ~~DO NOT~~ INTERFACE AND CONFRONT HONESTLY AND DRAMATICALLY.

1st Church in Community + World

AND THE ANONYMITY OF CITY LIFE WHICH ALLOWS A PERSON TO WORSHIP ALONE FOR YEARS, ALSO IS A COMPELLING FACTOR FOR MANY TO COME IN THE FIRST PLACE. THIS IS SUBTLE. THEY MAY NOT WANT TO EXCHANGE THE KISS OF PEACE, THEY MAY NOT WANT TO GET INVOLVED, BUT, AT THE SAME TIME, THEY ARE THERE OUT OF A NEED FOR COMMUNITY - FOR COMPANY - FOR CONTACT.

need anonymity but there is deeper need for community

AT THE BEGINNING OF THE FALL TERM, I ASKED A NEW SESSION TO SPEND A FEW MINUTES GETTING ACQUAINTED. ANOTHER ECCENTRICITY OF THE CITY CHURCH: EVENING MEETINGS ARE NOT CONVENIENT. OUR SESSION MEETS ON FRIDAY AFTERNOON AT 4:30 P.M. - NEVER FOR MORE THAN TWO HOURS - SO THERE ISN'T MUCH TIME FOR SMALL TALK. SO I ASKED THEM TO GO AROUND THE TABLE AND INTRODUCE THEMSELVES AND TELL A BIT ABOUT HOW THEY FIRST CAME TO FOURTH CHURCH AND WHAT KEEPS THEM COMING BACK. AN HOUR AND A HALF LATER WE COMPLETED THE PROCESS AND THEY TOLD A REMARKABLE STORY. THEY HAD COME AT FIRST FOR A VARIETY OF REASONS - BUT THIS IS A SUMMARY OF THE MOST COMMON RESPONSES: "I WAS NEW TO THE CITY - HADN'T BEEN INSIDE A CHURCH FOR YEARS - FOUND MYSELF WONDERING WHAT WENT ON IN THERE - FINALLY ACCEPTED A FRIEND'S INVITATION TO

ATTEND - SAT IN THE BALCONY FOR TWO YEARS WITHOUT SPEAKING TO ANYONE - LIKED THE MUSIC AND PREACHING - DIDN'T WANT TO GET INVOLVED - SOMEONE ASKED ME TO DO SOMETHING - I SAID YES AND HERE I AM." AND WHY THEY KEEP COMING? ALMOST TO A PERSON - "IT'S MY FAMILY - IT'S WHERE THERE ARE PEOPLE I CARE ABOUT. "IT IS MY COMMUNITY OF FAITH."

AND THEN ABOUT FAMILIES AND CHILDREN - TWO OBSERVATIONS:

1. MORE ARE STAYING IN THE CITY - HAVING BABIES AND STAYING DOWNTOWN

AND

2. MORE ARE OPEN TO AN URBAN ALTERNATIVE ON SUNDAY FOR THE VERY REASON THAT THEIR CHILDREN LIVE IN SUBURBIA SIX DAYS A WEEK AND NEED A LITTLE RACIAL AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY.

AND SO, WE'RE GROWING OUT OF OUR EDUCATIONAL SPACE AND OUR NURSERY IS

SERIOUSLY OVERCROWDED AND WE'RE BAPTIZ-
ING SIX BABIES A MONTH.

IT'S A STYLE OF COMMUNITY - A BLESSED
FELLOWSHIP OF PEOPLE WHO MAY NOT KNOW
ONE ANOTHER INTIMATELY, BUT WHO NEVER-
THELESS CARE ABOUT ONE ANOTHER AND ARE
TRYING TO DISCOVER WHAT IT MEANS TO LOVE
ONE ANOTHER. IT OCCURS TO ME THAT THIS
IS WHAT CITY CHURCHES ARE ABOUT AND IT
IS WHY WE MUST REMAIN.

I SAW A PICTURE RECENTLY LOOKING
DOWN MICHIGAN AVENUE IN 1914, THE YEAR
FOURTH CHURCH WAS BUILT. THE STEEPLE IS
THE HIGHEST STRUCTURE AROUND - THE
CHURCH DOMINATES THE INTERSECTION AND IS
VISIBLE FROM ALL DIRECTIONS. IT IS A
PICTURE NOT UNLIKE THE RELATIONSHIP OF
CHURCH TO CITY FOR A THOUSAND YEARS -
THE SOARING STEEPLE LIFTING EYES AND
HEARTS TO THE HEAVENS: THE CATHEDRAL AT
THE HEART OF THE COMMUNITY.

TODAY, RELATIVELY RECENTLY, THAT PICTURE IS NOT ONLY DIFFERENT, IT IS TOTALLY INVERTED. TODAY THE CHURCH IS SURROUNDED ON FOUR SIDES BY TOWERS OF BUSINESS AND COMMERCE. AND THE ONLY PERSPECTIVE FROM WHICH TO SEE IT ALL IS FROM THE 95TH FLOOR OF THE JOHN HANCOCK BUILDING. THERE, IN MINIATURE, LIKE A TINY, PRECIOUS JEWEL, IS THE CHURCH - NEVER MORE CLEARLY A REMINDER TO THE WORLD OF ANOTHER DIMENSION; A SIGN AND SYMBOL OF THE HOLY AND OF THE NATURE OF THE HUMAN.

A MAJOR PART OF OUR MISSION, AS COMMUNITIES OF FAITH IN THE CITY IS TO ASK THE HUMAN QUESTIONS: THE MEANING AND PURPOSE OF LIFE QUESTIONS- THE "WHAT IS IT ALL ABOUT" AND "WHAT AM I GOING TO DO WHEN I GROW UP QUESTIONS." UNIVERSAL HUMAN QUESTIONS, BUT I DO SENSE THEY ARE ASKED PARTICULARLY ~~BY CITY PEOPLE AND~~ HERE - in the Church

OVER THE YEARS I HAVE CONCLUDED THAT IT IS A ~~WORD~~ WE HAVE TO OFFER. IT IS ~~THE~~ FOUNDATION OF OUR COMMUNITY AND AT THE HEART OF OUR PASTORAL MINISTRY. IT IS OUR SENSE OF VOCATION.

VOCATION, WEBSTER SAYS, MEANS "SUMMONS." IT'S FROM THE LATIN VOCATUS - VOCARE IS THE VERB "TO CALL." VOCAL - VOICE - VOCATION - TO HAVE A VOCATION IS TO BE SUMMONED - TO HEAR A VOICE - TO HAVE A CALL. SO FAR SO GOOD.

THEN WEBSTER REFLECTS THE BIGGEST THEOLOGICAL ERROR IN THE HISTORY OF CHRISTENDOM - "AN ENTRY - INTO THE PRIESTHOOD OR RELIGIOUS ORDER."

FINALLY WEBSTER RETURNS TO THE POINT, "A VOCATION IS THE WORK IN WHICH A PERSON IS REGULARLY EMPLOYED."

BUT DEFINITION NUMBER TWO CONTAINS VERY IMPORTANT THEOLOGICAL ASSUMPTIONS - RELIGIOUS PROFESSIONALS HEAR VOICES

CALLING THEM TO THEIR "VOCATIONS," WHILE ALL THE REST SIMPLY DO WHATEVER PUTS BREAD AND BUTTER ON THE TABLE?

OUR TRADITION HAS A RADICAL, IMPORTANT AND REDEEMING WORD TO SAY ON THE TOPIC... namely —

BUT FIRST, DECIDING WHAT TO DO WHEN YOU GROW UP IS NOT AS SIMPLE AS IT USED TO BE.

TIME WAS WHEN YOU HAD TO KNOW WHAT YOU WANTED TO DO IN HIGH SCHOOL. WHEN I WENT TO COLLEGE, PEOPLE IN THE BLUE-COLLAR TOWN ASKED "WHY? WHAT DO YOU WANT TO DO?" I.E. THE REASON TO GO TO COLLEGE WAS TO ACQUIRE MARKETABLE SKILLS IN A VOCATION YOU HAD ALREADY CHOSEN, AT THE WISE OLD AGE OF SEVENTEEN.

AND THEN YOU GRADUATED AT 21 AND IF UNCLE SAM DIDN'T NEED YOUR SERVICES, YOU EITHER STARTED DOING WHAT YOU HAVE PREPARED TO DO; TEACH SCHOOL, FOR

INSTANCE, OR YOU ENTERED GRAD SCHOOL FOR A FEW MORE YEARS AND BEGAN DOING "IT" AT 24 OR 25.

THINK OF THE REVOLUTION IN OUR CULTURE IN VOCATION. IT IS NOW STANDARD FOR KIDS TO GRADUATE, COME HOME, "HANG OUT," AND DECIDE WHAT TO DO NEXT. AND THEN FOR THREE OR FOUR YEARS TO AGONIZE. MANY PROFESSIONAL SCHOOLS DON'T REALLY WANT THEM UNTIL THEY HAVE "HUNG OUT" FOR THREE YEARS. MY YOUNGSTERS HAVE ALL DONE IT. ON THE TELEPHONE, THEY TELL THEIR FRIENDS THEY'RE "HANGING OUT." SO THE PUSH OUT OF THE NEST HAS TO HAPPEN AGAIN BUT WITH FINESSE AND GENTLENESS. FOR ONE THING, THEY'RE AWFULLY BIG NOW!

I teach at MTS

~~MTS CLASS~~ - ADVANCED PREACHING - 1/2 SECOND CAREERS: JOHN NAISBETH AND PATRICIA ABURDENE, MEGATRENDS 2000 - THREE CAREER CHANGES e.g. TEACHING, HOME-MAKING, LAW: IN MY ~~CHURCH~~ -

said: "expect"

cmayer

I can think of individuals who have moved from to Seminary

ARCHITECTURE, TEACHING, REAL ESTATE,

from BANKING, ~~MERCHANDISING, ACCOUNTING~~,

From Prof. to Broker

to TRAVEL AGENT, BROKER. // UNDERSCORES

SOMETHING VERY IMPORTANT. // LIFE IS

GROWTH - HUMAN LIFE BECOMING. WE ARE

You've heard it so!

ALWAYS BECOMING. ("BE PATIENT, GOD ISN'T

DONE WITH ME" - TRUE! WE'RE NOT SET IN

CONCRETE. WE'RE ON THE WAY TO BECOMING.

PRESBYTERIAN MINISTER AND AUTHOR,

FRED BUECHNER, ADDRESSING SEMINARY

GRADUATES ONCE ADMITTED THAT AT 50 HE

WAS STILL NOT SURE HE HAD RESOLVED THE

MATTER OF WHAT TO BE WHEN HE GROWS UP.

"PEOPLE READ MY BOOKS, WANT ME TO AUTO-

GRAPH THEM, LISTEN TO ME SPEAK, ASK MY

OPINIONS... IF THEY ONLY KNEW HOW UNSURE

I AM."

transition

"WHEN JESUS ALSO HAD BEEN BAPTIZED,

A VOICE CAME FROM HEAVEN. 'YOU ARE MY

SON, THE BELOVED: WITH YOU I AM WELL

the quintessential example of call vocation Jesus at Bapt.

People are in church - looking for their vocation - looking for a resource - a place - to explore the most basic human question - "What do I want to be" * by our nature as city church - my sense is that it happens more here.

What resources are there - models - ? for this critical ministry? sermon

I'm intrigued that he was 30 not 17- or 21.

PLEASED.' JESUS WAS ABOUT THIRTY YEARS OLD WHEN HE BEGAN HIS WORK."

IN HIS ~~NEW~~ MEMOIR, DEADLINE, FORMER NEW YORK TIMES REPORTER, BUREAU CHIEF, EXECUTIVE EDITOR, JAMES RESTON, DESCRIBES THE YOUTHFUL NAIVETE AND HEADY OPTIMISM OF HIS EARLY LIFE, GROWING UP, EDUCATED AND WORKING IN THE AMERICAN MIDWEST.

AND THEN AT THIRTY HE FOUND HIMSELF IN LONDON DURING THE BLITZ, UNDER FIERCE ATTACK, SEPARATED FROM HIS WIFE AND NEW BABY, FACED FOR THE FIRST TIME WITH THE POSSIBILITY OF DEATH. HE STILL HAS THE LETTER HE WROTE THAT NIGHT IN LONDON TO HIS INFANT SON RICHARD AS BOMBS FELL:

"TO YOUR MOTHER I LEFT EVERYTHING I HAVE, A FEW DOLLARS, A LOT OF BOOKS, AND THE MEMORIES OF A SHORT AND HAPPY LIFE. TO YOU, ALAS I LEFT NOTHING..." [SEE PP. 93-94]

RESTON WRITES THAT HE WAS GLAD LATER HIS SON WAS TOO YOUNG TO READ IT. BUT THIRTY WAS FOR HIM, CLEARLY, A PIVOTAL AND IMPORTANT TIME.

"JESUS WAS ABOUT THIRTY YEARS OLD," LUKE ADDS AS A POSTSCRIPT TO THE ACCOUNT OF THE BAPTISM.

ANDREW GREELEY'S RESEARCH INTO CONTEMPORARY SPIRITUALITY SHOWS THAT "AROUND THE AGE OF THIRTY SERIOUS PRAYER BEGINS FOR MANY PEOPLE. AT AGE THIRTY, WHEN THE ILLUSION THAT WE ARE MASTERS OF OUR OWN FATE FADES ADULTS DEVELOP A DEEPER NEED TO CALL ON THE MASTER OF THE UNIVERSE." [NEWSWEEK, 1/6/92]

AND SO, AT THE AGE OF THIRTY, A YOUNG ADULT FROM NAZARETH SHOWED UP ONE DAY IN A CROWD OF PEOPLE WHO HAD COME TO THE JORDAN RIVER TO HEAR A STRANGE PREACHER BY THE NAME OF JOHN.

WHAT DID IT MEAN FOR JESUS? WHAT WAS HE DOING THERE IN THE CROWD THAT DAY, LISTENING TO JOHN PREACH? PERHAPS HE WAS FREE OF HIS RESPONSIBILITY OF CARING FOR HIS FAMILY, FREE TO DO WHAT HE WANTED TO DO. PERHAPS HE WAS RESTLESS, BORED. PERHAPS, AS ANDREW GREELEY SUGGESTS, HE WAS THINKING ABOUT THE MEANING OF HIS LIFE AND WHAT HE REALLY BELIEVED AND PERHAPS HE WAS DECIDING WHAT TO DO WITH THE REST OF IT.

WALTER BURGHARDT, A JESUIT WHO TEACHES AT GEORGETOWN, HAS WRITTEN A BOOK ON THE SEASONS OF LIFE AND SUGGESTS THAT WHILE WE MAY MAKE OCCUPATIONAL DECISIONS, WHERE TO GO TO WORK AND RELATIONAL DECISIONS, WHO TO HOOK UP WITH, LONG BEFORE - PERHAPS IN OUR 20S OR EVEN OUR TEEN YEARS - THESE DECISIONS ABOUT PLACE IN THE WORLD AND PERSONAL IDENTITY ACTUALLY COME LATER, BEGINNING AROUND

THIRTY, AND IN SOME SENSE CONTINUING FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES. [SEASONS THAT LAUGH OR WEEP, MUSINGS ON THE HUMAN JOURNEY, P. 33 FF.]

THE SEQUENCE, TO USE JESUS AS AN EXAMPLE, IS CRISIS - DECIDING TO LEAVE ROUTINE AND SECURITY AND GO OUT TO HEAR WHAT'S GOING ON AT THE RIVER; EXPERIENCE - FOR JESUS, THE ACT OF BAPTISM; DECISION - THE COMMITMENT TO A NEW IDEA, A LARGER VISION AND THE COURAGE TO FOLLOW IT; AND FINALLY GRACE - THE WORD OF AFFIRMATION. "YOU ARE MY SON, MY DAUGHTER, THE BELOVED; WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED."

IT IS A CRITICAL SEQUENCE - AND SOCIAL SCIENTISTS ARE TELLING US, GIVEN THE PECULIARITIES OF OUR TIME AND PLACE, NOT AT ALL A SIMPLE MATTER.

FOR ONE THING, WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF LATITUDE FROM THE AGE OF THIRTY ON.

- typical Young Urban Professional

looking for a mate -

THIRTY MEANS REALLY DIGGING INTO ONE'S CAREER, HAVING BABIES AND PARENTING YOUNG CHILDREN. FOR M.D.'S AND J.D.'S, M.B.A.'S AND PH.D.'S, THIRTY MEANS THAT THE ACCUMULATED BILLS OF A DECADE OF HIGHER EDUCATION MUST BE PAID SO IT'S TIME TO GENERATE SERIOUS INCOME.

FURTHERMORE, THERE ARE MAJOR SOCIETAL FACTORS THAT MITIGATE AGAINST THIS CREATIVE DECISION MAKING.

A UNIVERSITY OF PENNSYLVANIA PSYCHOLOGIST, MARTIN SELIGMAN, ANALYZES THE EPIDEMIC OF DEPRESSION IN OUR CULTURE. HE WRITES, "YOUNG PERSONS ARE TEN TIMES LIKELIER TO SUFFER SEVERE DEPRESSION THAN THEIR GRANDPARENTS." [LEARNED OPTIMISM, P. 282]

THERE ARE TWO REASONS, DR. SELIGMAN PROPOSES. FIRST, YOUNG ADULTS HAVE MORE POWER TO MAKE DECISIONS AND MORE ALTERNATIVES THAN ANYONE IN ALL OF HUMAN

in spite of need to generate income

HISTORY. BUT SECOND, AND MORE SERIOUSLY, THE EMERGENCE OF RISING EXPECTATIONS FOR SELF-SATISFACTION, GRATIFICATION AND MEANING IMMEDIATELY; NOT SOME TIME IN THE FUTURE WHEN THE SHIP COMES IN, BUT NOW. A JOB IS NO LONGER SIMPLY THE WAY TO GENERATE INCOME. IT MUST PRODUCE MEANING FOR LIFE. MARRIAGE, SELIGMAN OBSERVES, IS NOT JUST FOR PRODUCING THE NEXT GENERATION. "OUR MATE TODAY MUST BE ETERNALLY SEXY, AND THIN, AND INTERESTING TO TALK TO, AND GOOD AT TENNIS." [P. 283]

"MAXIMAL SELF," SELIGMAN CALLS US. "THE MODERN INDIVIDUAL IS NOT THE PEASANT OF YORE WITH A FIXED FUTURE YAWNING AHEAD. HE OR SHE IS A FRANTIC TRADING FLOOR OF OPTIONS, DECISIONS AND PREFERENCES." THE RESULT IS DEPRESSION AND A LOSS OF COMMUNITY AND A DECREASE IN

COMMITMENT TO THE COMMON GOOD / "THE WANING OF THE COMMUNITY." apropos our theme!

THERE IS, I BELIEVE, SOMETHING STIRRING IN OUR CULTURE. WE ARE BEGINNING TO UNDERSTAND THESE DYNAMICS. PERHAPS WE DISCOVERED THAT LIFE COMMITTED TO NOTHING LARGER THAN ITSELF IS PRETTY MEAGER. PERHAPS IT IS SIMPLY A SENSE THAT I HAVE ONE LIFE TO LIVE AND IT IS A MATTER OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO ME TO USE IT FOR SOME PURPOSE OTHER THAN MY OWN AMUSEMENT.

JESUS WENT TO THE JORDAN RIVER ONE DAY, LEFT THE ROUTINE OF CARPENTRY AND DECIDED TO GIVE HIS LIFE TO GOD. PART OF WHAT JESUS DID DURING THAT PERIOD OF TIME BETWEEN THE AGE OF TWELVE AND THIRTY WAS WHAT ALL OF US DO, NAMELY GET READY FOR THE REST OF OUR LIVES; WAIT FOR, WONDER ABOUT, STRUGGLE WITH THE OPTIONS, EXPERIMENT WITH AND GENER-

Do you know the name Dartell Davis -? last Oct. 7 - yrs !! Bob Green - want to do speech ? Tuesday - (we needed 40) 2,000 requests. Gov at mtg.. 6 sets of forms - Alex Kotlowitz this Am We're talking - purpose meaning - vocation

ALLY TRY TO IDENTIFY THE PURPOSE OF OUR BEING HERE - OUR VOCATION, OUR CALLING. THAT TASK IS RARELY FINALIZED. RATHER THERE IS A TANTALIZING SENSE IN WHICH WE ARE ALWAYS IN THE PROCESS OF DECIDING WHAT WE WILL BE WHEN WE GROW UP.

It's why people come to your client — It's true for all of us —

IT MAY BE WHY WE ARE HERE THIS ~~EVENING~~ morning - LIKE JESUS STANDING ON THE BANK OF THE RIVER, WAITING TO HEAR A WORD THAT WILL HELP US KNOW WHAT TO DO WITH OUR LIVES.

JESUS RESPONDED TO THE WORD HE HEARD BY STEPPING INTO THE WATER. FOR HIM THAT ACT MEANT OPENING HIMSELF TO GOD, TO GOD'S PURPOSE FOR HIS LIFE. AND SO I PRESUME TO COMMEND YOU FOR ~~DOING~~ ~~THAT, AND~~ IF YOU HAVE NOT, OR IF YOU ARE HESITANT AND TENTATIVE, TO INVITE YOU - TO STEP IN, TO DO WHAT YOU MUST DO, TO OPEN YOUR LIFE TO GOD, TO GIVE YOURSELF TO GOD'S PURPOSE, TO COMMIT YOUR LIFE TO

Provide for that invite to others here & I presume & invite you

SOME PURPOSE LARGER THAN YOUR OWN SECURITY AND AMUSEMENT, TO GIVE YOUR LIFE - AND IN THE GIVING TO BECOME WHO GOD WANTS YOU TO BE.

DAG HAMMARSKJOLD'S DIARY ENTRY FOR WHITSUNDAY, 1961, CAPTURES THE SENSE OF IT.

"I DON'T KNOW WHO - OR WHAT - PUT THE QUESTION. I DON'T KNOW WHEN IT WAS PUT. I DON'T EVEN REMEMBER ANSWERING. BUT AT SOME MOMENT I DID ANSWER YES TO SOMEONE - OR SOMETHING - AND FROM THAT HOUR I WAS CERTAIN THAT EXISTENCE IS MEANINGFUL AND THAT, THEREFORE, MY LIFE, IN SELF-SURRENDER, HAD A GOAL." ~~FROM THAT MOMENT I HAVE KNOWN WHAT IT MEANS 'NOT TO LOOK BACK' AND 'TO TAKE NO THOUGHT FOR THE MORROW.'~~" [MARKINGS, P. 205]

THERE ARE RISKS. A FEW MONTHS AFTER HE WROTE THAT, HAMMARSKJOLD DIED

for instance to God's [illegible] as it is expressed in the by this community of faith.

IN AN AIR CRASH WHILE FLYING TO NEGOTIATE A UNITED NATIONS CEASE FIRE IN AFRICA. THREE YEARS AFTER JESUS STEPPED INTO THE JORDAN RIVER TO BE BAPTIZED, HE WAS CRUCIFIED.

IT IS SAFER TO STAY PUT, NOT TO SAY YES, NOT TO STEP FORWARD. IT WILL CERTAINLY BE LESS EXHILARATING, LESS EXCITING, LESS ALIVE.

HAMMARSKJOLD FELT THAT HIS LIFE HAD MEANING AND PURPOSE AFTER HE SAID "YES." AND JESUS, WHEN THE WATERS OF BAPTISM FLOWED DOWN OVER HIS HEAD, HEARD A VOICE. NO ONE ELSE HEARD IT, LUKE SUGGESTED. THE VOICE WAS FOR HIM AND IT SAID SOMETHING HE HAD NOT KNOWN OR HEARD BEFORE. THE VOICE SAID:

"YOU ARE MY SON, THE BELOVED. WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED."

AFTER THE CRISIS - AFFIRMATION; AFTER THE DECISION - UNCONDITIONAL LOVE.

It is a word People come here on Sun. Am - + to programs + ministries - + hear

Ans → IT IS THE WORD WE WANT TO HEAR AND NEED TO HEAR.

~~SO TODAY, IN YOUR HEART OF HEARTS - TAKE A STEP. SAY "YES" TO YOUR LIFE - GIVE IT TO GOD, AND HEAR GOD SAY: "YOU ARE MY DAUGHTER / "YOU ARE MY SON. THE BELOVED. "WITH YOU I AM WELL PLEASED." AMEN.~~

So as you ask the human questn - ("What do I want to do with the rest of my life ? / What do I want to be when I grow up -)

know that this church is a unique + precious community of people asking that same question —

People - meeting you + me - who want + need to step into the river: to say 'Yes' to life : / to give it all to God - and then to hear - the voice of God - "You are my daughter / son - The beloved - with you ..